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U.S. Policy Toward the New Independent States: A Pragmatic Strategy Grounded in America's Fundamental Interests

Warren Christopher
United States Department of State

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SECRETARY OF STATE WARREN CHRISTOPHER

Good afternoon. I would like to thank President Brand for that warm welcome, and Indiana University for inviting me to speak today. I am pleased to be here with Robert Orr, former Indiana Governor and former Ambassador to Singapore.

Four decades ago, Indiana President Herman Wells showed foresight in founding the Russian and East European Institute. Today, the Institute is among the country's most respected centers of regional study. And many of its graduates have forged distinguished careers in this field, including Jim Collins, my special advisor for the New Independent States.

Your state's political leaders have played a crucial role in shaping our policy toward the former Soviet Union. When I called Senator Lugar to ask if he could join me here today, he said he really needed to be in Washington shepherding the ratification of our START II Treaty with Russia through the Senate. Under these circumstances, I reconsidered my invitation. And I will always be indebted to your highly respected Congressman, Lee Hamilton, for his counsel and support. You should be proud that Indiana has produced two such outstanding leaders of both parties.

Since his first day in office, President Clinton has pursued a pragmatic policy of engagement with Russia and the other New Independent States as the best investment we can make in our nation's security and prosperity. Our approach is to cooperate where our interests coincide, and to manage our differences constructively and candidly where they do not. We support reform because in the long run, its success benefits not only the people of the region, but the American people as well. We understand that Russia and the other new states face a tumultuous future. For that reason, our policy is focused on the long haul. In sum, our approach is realistic and grounded in America's strategic interests.

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The successful transformation of the former Soviet empire into a region of sovereign, democratic states is a matter of fundamental importance to the United States. These twelve nations cover one-sixth of the world's surface. Their territory is home to tens of thousands of nuclear weapons. Their people and resources give them vast economic potential.

Twice in this century, political events in this region have remade the world—profoundly for the worse in 1917, and profoundly for the better in 1991. The events of 1991 set in motion two historic transformations, both of which served our fundamental interests and those of the people of the region. The first is the disappearance of a hostile totalitarian empire, and its replacement by twelve newly independent states. The second is the collapse of communist dictatorship, and the movement toward democratic institutions and free markets.

These transformations have presented us with a remarkable opportunity to encourage stability in the region and enhance the security of the American people. We have taken advantage of that opportunity in ways that have paid enormous dividends. Indeed, our engagement with Russia, Ukraine, and their neighbors has made America safer than at any time since the end of World War II. Thousands of nuclear warheads, built to destroy America, are themselves being destroyed. Those that remain no longer target our cities and homes.

Last year, President Clinton negotiated a trilateral understanding with Russia and Ukraine that sets Ukraine on the path to become a non-nuclear power. In so doing, Ukraine joined Kazakhstan and Belarus in agreeing to give up nuclear weapons. We are leading efforts to dismantle their weapons and safeguard nuclear materials under a bipartisan program sponsored by Senator Nunn and Senator Lugar. In Defense Secretary Perry's words, it literally "removes the threat—missile by missile, warhead by warhead, factory by factory."

Last December, President Clinton and the leaders of the region's nuclear states brought the START I agreement into force and paved the way for implementing START II. Together, these important treaties will cut strategic nuclear forces in Russia and the United States by almost two-thirds.

Our diplomacy has also made Europe more secure. After patient but firm efforts by President Bush and President Clinton, Russian troops completed their withdrawal last August from Germany and the Baltic states. Now, for the first time since World War II, the people of Central Europe are free of occupying forces.

Despite the progress that has been made, we have no illusions about how difficult the region's transformation will be, or how long it will take to overcome centuries of empire and autocracy. Ultimately, only the peoples of the region can assure their success.

From the outset, our approach has been focused on the entire region of the former Soviet Union, in part because the futures of all these countries are closely linked. I am convinced that the success of reform in each of these countries will have a positive impact on success in the others.

Our region-wide approach can be seen in the emphasis we have placed on financial support to the non-Russian states—which in 1995 will represent two-thirds of our assistance to the region. Increasingly, we are supporting private sector trade and investment. American firms have signed multi-billion dollar energy deals in Kazakhstan and in Azerbaijan—the latter country so rich in oil that its capital was described in the 12th century as "blazing like a fire all night." Last year, our Overseas Private Investment Corporation provided almost $1 billion in financing for projects in the region. These programs will generate new exports and jobs for Americans.

The Clinton Administration has been steadfast in support of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all the New Independent States. The region's history of imperial conquest underscores how important it is that all countries scrupulously respect international law and the rights of their neighbors.

Of course, some states of the former Soviet Union command particular attention because of their potential to influence the future of the region. Ukraine is critical. With its size and its position, juxtaposed between Russia and Central Europe, it is a linchpin of European security. An independent, non-nuclear, and reforming Ukraine is also vital to the success of reform in the other New Independent States. That is why the United States has joined Britain and Russia in providing security assurances for Ukraine.

The United States has consistently led the international effort to support economic reform in Ukraine. Last year, we convinced the G-7 to pledge over $4 billion for that country. In October, Ukraine's government launched a courageous program of market reform. We responded by increasing our assistance for 1994 by $250 million, to a total commitment of $900 million. Ukraine is now the fourth largest recipient of U.S. assistance after Israel, Egypt, and Russia. It is important that the Ukrainian Rada fully support President Kuchma's economic reform program.

Of course, the future of Ukraine and every other state in the region will be profoundly affected by the outcome of Russia's new revolution. That is why the deliberations of Russia's parliament and the fate of the ruble are on everyone's mind, not just in Moscow, St. Petersburg, and Vladivostok, but also in Kiev, Almaty, and Baku.

In May, President Clinton will travel to Moscow to meet President Yeltsin for the seventh time. This summit comes at an important moment. Reform in Russia is under strain. The war in Chechnya continues. We have differences with Russia in foreign policy.

But whatever the problems, we must not lose sight of the breathtaking changes we have witnessed since the breakup of the Soviet Union. Ten years ago, almost 400 million people from the Baltic to the Bering Seas were subject to totalitarian dictatorship and hemmed in by minefields and barbed wire. Today, Vilnius, Warsaw and Kiev are free. Moscow is alive with political debate. Siberia is becoming a synonym for opportunity, not oblivion.

Perspective and a sense of history are also important. Not long ago, a severe disagreement between the United States and the Soviet Union could threaten a nuclear confrontation. Today, we do not always agree, and there are obviously new challenges in our relationship. But every difference is not a crisis. We address our differences constructively, without threatening to blow up the world.

Today, the real question is not whether we should engage with Russia, but how. We will reject policies that reflect short-term political pressures, but undermine the long-term interests of the United States. We will continue to work with Russia where our interests coincide. We will not hold our relationship hostage to any one issue. But we will remain ready to speak openly and act appropriately when Russian actions run counter to our interests.

Our policy toward Russia has been and will continue to be based on a clear-eyed understanding of the facts on the ground. As President Clinton has stressed, we reject the superficial caricature of Russia that suggests it is predestined to aggression, predisposed to dictatorship, or predetermined to economic failure. At the same time, we are under no illusion that success is assured.

The truth is, Russia has a choice. It can define itself in terms of its past or in terms of the future.

In many areas Russia is courageously making the right choices. It has a freely elected President and Parliament and a democratic constitution. It has an independent press, which often criticizes central government policies. Debate in the Parliament is vigorous and open.

Economic reform is continuing. The government has acted boldly to bring inflation down. An ambitious privatization program has altered Russia's economic landscape. The private sector now accounts for 50 percent of Russia's GDP.

Two weeks ago, Russia initialled a $6.4 billion agreement with the IMF, which requires Russia to continue its fight against inflation, implement an austere budget, liberalize the energy sector, and free more prices from state control. This agreement is a significant landmark on the hard march to a stable market economy.

These positive changes are all the more notable in light of the ruinous legacy that Russian reformers are having to overcome. After 75 years of communism, much of the old elite remains entrenched in government and industry. Trust in democratic institutions is fragile—and so are the institutions themselves. The rule of law is in its infancy. Crime and corruption are rampant. These problems could undermine democracy if they are not dealt with effectively.

The economic legacy is also difficult. The new Russia inherited from the Soviet Union a decrepit industrial base that has wasted natural resources and produced a string of environmental disasters—from Chernobyl, to chemical pollution in the Urals, to the drying up of the Aral Sea.

And then there is the legacy of empire. Some 150 ethnic groups live within Russia's eleven time zones. During the Soviet period, borders between the internal regions and republics of the empire were changed by communist leaders over 90 times. The central government of Russia has made progress in improving relations with the diverse peoples within the Russian Federation. But its actions in Chechnya today threaten its ability to emerge as a democratic, multi-ethnic state.

The Chechnya crisis began as Russia sought to deal with a complex problem with deep historical roots. Now a city and many villages have been destroyed, thousands have died, and the tensions that led to the fighting have surely been exacerbated. Russia's conduct in Chechnya has been tragically wrong. Its decision to escalate fighting there in the last week is a serious mistake.

That is why I have urged the Russian government to end the carnage, to accept a permanent mission from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, to provide humanitarian relief and to reach a political settlement. It is patently clear that the Russian government is paying a very high price for Chechnya both at home and internationally.

It is easy enough to enumerate our differences with Russia, or with other states of the former Soviet Union. But I do not have the luxury of making a list and walking away. My job is to build areas of agreement, to develop policies to manage our differences, and always to advance our nation's interests. Let me describe the five key goals of our strategy for the coming year, as they relate to all the states of the former Soviet Union.

First, we aim to resolve a number of important security issues vital to every American. In 1995, we are pursuing the most ambitious arms control agenda in history. President Clinton and I have urged the Senate to ratify START II before the U.S.-Russian summit in May. The Russian parliament should act promptly to do the same. We are working closely with Russia to achieve the indefinite extension of the Non-Proliferation Treaty. We will also press to conclude a Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty—thereby realizing the vision set forth three decades ago by President Kennedy.

We are also determined to combat the growing threat posed by nuclear smuggling. We must prevent rogue states and terrorists from acquiring nuclear weapons and materials. Nunn-Lugar programs will help us achieve this goal by dismantling nuclear weapons in the former Soviet Union and safeguarding the resulting nuclear materials. Full funding for Nunn-Lugar is vital to our nation's security.

Because of the importance we attach to fighting the spread of nuclear weapons, we are firmly opposed to Russia's nuclear cooperation with Iran. Russia is a neighbor of Iran. It will rue the day it cooperated with this terrorist state if Iran builds nuclear weapons with the benefit of Russian expertise and equipment. Russia should take note that no major industrial democracy cooperates with Iran on nuclear matters. It is simply too dangerous to be permitted. For this reason, it is important that in our meeting last week, Foreign Minister Kozyrev and I agreed to set up a working group to examine non-proliferation issues, including the consequences of nuclear cooperation with Iran.

A second goal for 1995 will be to cooperate on a newer set of global or transnational issues, including crime, energy, the environment, and space.

During the Cold War, such cooperation was impossible. Today it is essential.

International crime is a growing threat to the lives and livelihoods of countless Americans, and to the prospects for reform in the former Soviet Union. I have made the fight against global crime a top priority of U.S. foreign policy. FBI Director Louis Freeh and I have worked together to set up an FBI office in Moscow—to cooperate with the Russians to combat organized crime, corruption and drug trafficking.

Vice President Gore and Prime Minister Chernomyrdin are spearheading efforts to improve the efficiency of the Russian oil and gas sector, thereby raising productivity and reducing that industry's high levels of pollution. They are also strengthening our cooperation with Russia in space—symbolized today by the space station Mir, with its first American crew member on board.

Our cooperation on these issues is not limited to Russia. We will continue to work with Ukraine and our G-7 partners to overcome the dangerous aftermath of Chernobyl. We are also helping Kazakhstan to manage its enormous energy resources in economically sound and environmentally safe ways.

Third, we will continue carefully targeted assistance programs that increase our security, expand our prosperity, and promote our interest in democratic reform. Nunn-Lugar monies will continue to advance our strategic interest in dismantling nuclear weapons. Our assistance will also continue to support the vital elements of a working democracy and civil society, including a free press and jury trials. And by supporting privatization and small business development, it will encourage free markets, and open new opportunities for American companies. Most of our assistance will go to private organizations and local governments outside Moscow.

Assistance has put America on the right side of the struggle for change in Russia. Some people say we should end these programs to punish Russia when it does something we oppose. I am all for maximizing our leverage. But I have personally reviewed our assistance programs and concluded that cutting them back now would make no sense. The critics of those programs need to ask themselves some tough questions. Would they stop the funding necessary to dismantle the nuclear weapons that once targeted American cities? Would they cut off support for privatization and free elections—wiping out programs that strengthen the very forces in Russian society that share our interests and values?

I believe that when they understand these choices, the American people will adopt the only course that makes sense: that is, to make the necessary investments now to make our nation more secure and prosperous for generations to come. I call on both the House and Senate to fund fully our request for assistance to the New Independent States.

The fundamental basis of the assistance program is to encourage all of the New Independent States to move forward with reform. Free elections are especially vital. President Nazarbayev's recent effort to extend his term unilaterally is a step backward for Kazakhstan. We call on him to renew his commitment to hold timely parliamentary elections, followed by scheduled presidential elections in 1996. We applaud President Yeltsin's commitment to hold parliamentary elections at the end of this year and presidential elections next year. When President Clinton goes to Moscow in May, you can be sure he will underscore the importance we attach to that commitment.

In meeting with President Yeltsin, President Clinton will be dealing with the first freely elected leader of Russia. But he will also talk directly to the Russian people and meet a cross section of Russian society—especially those who are committed to reform. The United States will continue to cultivate strong ties with a wide range of leaders and institutions in and out of the Russian government. To encourage pluralism in Russia, we will deal with Russia as a pluralistic society.

Fourth, we will reinforce the independence of Russia's neighbors and support their further development as market democracies. We will also use our good offices to help resolve conflicts in the region. Last December, we persuaded Russia that an OSCE-led peacekeeping mission in Nagorno-Karabakh was preferable to unilateral action. If a settlement is reached, such a mission would set a powerful precedent for conflict resolution in the New Independent States. It is vital that Russia continue to cooperate with the OSCE to ensure its success.

Fifth, we will advance the President's comprehensive strategy for building a stable, peaceful and integrated Europe. Just as we had in Western Europe after World War II, we now have a rare and historic opportunity to build a new security architecture for all of Europe that will last for generations.

President Clinton's vision includes several key elements. The OSCE will have a larger and more operational role. NATO's Partnership for Peace will strengthen its ties to Central Europe and to the New Independent States. NATO will move forward with its steady and deliberate process to accept

new members, following the approach laid out by the NATO ministers last December. And we will seek a stronger relationship between NATO and Russia in parallel with NATO expansion.

In the process of NATO expansion, each potential member will be judged individually, according to its capabilities and its commitment to the principles of the NATO treaty. The fundamental decisions will be made by NATO, in consultation with potential members. The process will be transparent to all and there will be no vetoes by third parties.

As I emphasized to Foreign Minister Kozyrev last week, it is in Russia's interest to participate constructively in the process of European integration. Russia has an enormous stake in a stable and peaceful Europe. No country has suffered more when Europe has not been at peace. Russia's path to deeper involvement in Europe is open. It should not choose to isolate itself from this effort.

Building a new security architecture in Europe is part of a larger strategy of integrating the new democracies of the former Soviet Union into the major institutions of the West, including the European Union, the World Trade Organization, the OECD, and the G-7. These institutions give structure, legitimacy, and strength to the common enterprise of the Western democracies—namely, promoting peace and economic growth. It will serve our interests to extend the benefits of integration—as well as its considerable obligations—to Europe's new democracies, including the New Independent States.

The pace of integration, however, will depend on the extent to which the nations of the former Soviet Union continue on the reform path and adhere to international norms. WTO membership, for example, is only possible for nations that adopt trade and investment rules consistent with world standards. Likewise, the evolution of Russia's participation in Western institutions will be affected by the world's judgment of its conduct in Chechnya and its respect for international norms.

The United States will continue to pursue a realistic and pragmatic course toward all the New Independent States—a course that has produced concrete benefits for Americans. We will not take for granted the success of the historic transformations now under way in the former Soviet Union. But we will continue to work to bring about the best possible outcome. Our enduring interests demand that we stay engaged. Our policy is rooted in American interests. We will protect our security, our welfare, and our values.

As we travel this difficult yet promising path, we will call upon the same qualities that have sustained American leadership in the past: steadiness, consistency, and reliability in pursuing our interests and upholding our commitments. These are the qualities that have kept America strong and free. These are the qualities that must guide us now as we build the more secure and integrated world that is in the fundamental interest of the American people.

Thank you very much.